



Stay Indoors: The Slogan for Nowruz 2020

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March 21 marks the beginning of the new year with the advent of Spring in the Iranian calendars. Nowruz, a day of national celebration and jubilation is rooted in Zoroastrianism, an ancient Persian religion that predates both Christianity and Islam. It is considered as the most important festival and is a national holiday being celebrated with great pomp and show both in Iran and in countries that were once part and parcel of the then Persian Empire. The holidays start from the 21st March and extend for a period of 13 days. As an ancient tradition, the houses are cleaned and tables decorated with seven ingredients (items) starting with the Persian alphabet, “S”, to welcome the new year. All these ingredients symbolize health, fortune and vigor. These traditions have been upheld for thousands of years, and the new year falls exactly on the day of the vernal equinox each year, without a change if a millisecond.

In the 71st plenary meeting on February 23, 2010, the General Assembly welcomed the inclusion of Nowruz in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in September 30, 2009.

After having emerged in China, last December for the first time, the novel coronavirus, commonly known as COVID-19 has spread to more than 180 countries with Iran being the worst hit. For the first time, researchers from China reported the maiden presence of the novel coronavirus in bronchoalveolar lavage fluid in three patients by whole genome sequencing, direct PCR, and culture (1), and this set forth the spread of this virus worldwide and heralding a global disaster of insurmountable dimensions.

The pneumonia reported in a cluster of patients for which no cause could be ascertained was epidemiologically linked to a sea food in Wuhan, China (2).

The virus spread in a matter of days and weeks and swept the entire world affecting people from all walks of life. Its repercussions were voluminous, halting all economic and productive activities to a standstill thus affecting millions of workers and laborers. Its clutches and tentacles have spread all around us killing the affected ones with a rapidity that is unbelievable and beyond our comprehension.

People all around are mourning their near and dear ones who succumbed to the cruel clutches of this virus hitherto unknown to the stalwarts of medicine.

In Iran, itself, there is an intense fear, panic and desperation like elsewhere in the rest of the world. The fear of the unknown invader is all the more disturbing and nerve wrecking. Who would be the next target? This question obviously perturbs both the intelligentsia and the lay man.

People display obvious fear that any exposure or close communication would render them highly vulnerable to the virus which is feared to be present everywhere. The slogan to stay indoors to shield themselves from the omnipresent invader- the coronavirus has been accepted by all and sundry during the Nowruz holidays starting March 21. This is perhaps the first time in the history of Iran that Nowruz which has been celebrated for millenia without fail would not be celebrated this year in compliance with instructions to stay indoors but with a wailing heart because it is an event for which people have emotional attachments.

People in Iran and neighboring countries would be welcoming Nowruz this year by lighting candles in their balconies in memories of those who succumbed to this deadly disease for which our present day knowledge has failed to offer a cure or a vaccine.

Likewise, elsewhere in the world, the bells will toll for all those who got inflicted with this virulent virus and are now lying fathoms deep in their graves.

Footnote

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